

Cox and Dinkins LEEDing the way in green building

COLUMBIA, SC – Like other civil engineering and land-surveying companies, Cox and Dinkins knows the importance of designing sound, functional structures. But one thing that separates them from other such companies, however, is its commitment to green building and sustainable design.

Consider, for example, its new facility in Columbia (on Beltline Boulevard). The facility, which was completed in 2003, is the first commercial Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified building in South Carolina.

Just what is green building? Green buildings can be described as resource-efficient buildings that conserve energy and use construction materials – including recycled, renewable and reused resources – wisely. They are designed and constructed to ensure that they are healthy for their occupants; are typically more economical due to lower operating costs; and are good for the environment. Simply stated, green buildings are environmentally responsible, profitable and healthy places to live and work.

Because of Cox and Dinkins' commitment to sustainable building practices, each design consideration had to be evaluated based on its social, environmental and economic impacts. The new 11,000 square foot facility initially cost 3-5 percent more than traditional construction – a small price to pay for substantial savings over the life of the building. The new building is almost twice the size of Cox and Dinkins' old facility, yet utility costs have only increased 25 percent.

A number of building decisions were consciously made to improve air quality in the new facility. Paints containing no volatile organic compounds (VOCs) were used, water-based sealants rather than polyurethane sealants were used on the hardwood floors and the linoleum used on floors and countertops contains no VOCs. In addition, 90 percent of the buildings occupants have direct access to natural light in their work areas. Each of these design decisions contributes to a healthier and more productive work environment.

The use of recycled content materials and the decision to incorporate salvaged materials are evident. The building's carpet was specifically chosen because it contains recycled content and could be recycled at end-of-life. One of the most impressive features of the building is the foyer that showcases reclaimed wood from a plantation in Blenheim, S.C. Earth-toned paint and flooring as well as the abundance of natural light add a sense of warmth upon entering the facility.

The recycling of construction debris was also a priority. During construction there were five 30-yard roll-off containers on-site for

waste collection. Four of the five containers went to recycling facilities with only one going to a landfill. More than 75 percent of the construction debris was diverted from landfills. Scrap wood was ground into mulch, gypsum wallboard was used for lime and concrete block was used as backfill. In addition, cardboard, plastic, paper and glass were recycled. Since the facility opened in September 2003, recycling continues to be emphasized with a recycling bin present in every office. The City of Columbia provides curbside collection of white paper, aluminum cans and plastic bottles. A dedicated employee takes cardboard and styrofoam to a recycling drop-off center.

Other green features of the building include a computer-controlled irrigation system that monitors rainfall and can override the scheduled waterings after sufficient rainfall. Six high-efficiency, residential-type HVAC units that achieve the highest possible SEER – Seasonal Energy Efficiency Rating – maintain a comfortable work environment. There are also motion-activated lights in each office. The building is located near a bus line so that employees can use public transportation. Bicycle racks, a shower and individual lockers are available for employees choosing to ride their bikes to work.

"It was very important for me to build a facility that was environmentally responsible, comfortable for my employees and productive for my business. I wanted to do all of these things without having to move out of the downtown area where we have been located for over 40 years. I think we have achieved all of these goals and provided an excellent environment in which to work," said Gene Dinkins, president of Cox and Dinkins.

For its efforts, Cox and Dinkins was awarded LEED certification on July 15, 2004. The LEED rating system is a voluntary, consensus-based national standard for developing high-performance, sustainable buildings. It is developed and administered by the U.S. Green Building Council. For more information about LEED, visit www.usgbc.org/LEED/LEED_main.asp.

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